

Berlin Document Center Database

Summary: The Berlin Document Center (BDC) database constitutes a partial finding aid to the contents of the microfilmed BDC biographic collections in NARA custody. Although it can facilitate searches for individuals' names contained in the biographic collections, the database is far too incomplete to substitute for detailed searches among the records themselves.

Background: From its establishment under U.S. military authority in 1945, the Berlin Document Center served as a collection center for biographical records and related reference materials pertaining to Nazi Germany. These records documented membership in the Nazi Party and such affiliated organizations as the SS, SA, and Nazi-sponsored professional organizations, as well as the naturalization of ethnic Germans from other European countries as Reich citizens. Following the end of Allied military occupation the BDC's functions were assumed by the U.S. Department of State, which continued to operate the center until its termination in 1994. As provided in a formal agreement between the United States and German Governments, the original biographic collections were then restituted to the Bundesarchiv in Berlin, while microfilm copies were transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). The microfilmed biographic collections, totaling over 39,000 rolls, are located in the Microfilm Research Room at Archives II, College Park, Md.

At the time that most of the records were microfilmed in Berlin (1989-94), the BDC arranged for the preparation of a database as a finding aid to the microfilmed collections. Each newly-filmed individual record item received a unique 10-digit barcode keyed to the collection and series to which it belonged, in principle allowing each item's microfilm location to be readily identified in the database: Thus barcode 6 005 011 143 represents an entry in the Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt or RuSHA series (the first four digits) within the SS biographic collection for the individual Manfred Coblenz, located in the RuSHA microfilm series, roll number A5365, beginning frame number 813. Some extensive series that had already been filmed, including the SS Officers' Files, were allocated general barcode designations but were not retrievable by microfilm location. Other extensive series, notably the large number of Nazi Party membership cards, were apparently excluded from the database entirely due to their volume. Still other series were excluded because index cards had already been prepared for their contents (the cards were subsequently microfiched and accompanied the transfer of the microfilmed records). The individual barcodes, with accompanying microfilm locations, were intended for capture by the database as a fairly comprehensive finding aid to most of the collections. It is evident that the database had to be concluded before it could complete the intended task.

The database, prepared by a private German firm under contract with the BDC, employed a software application not compatible with NARA systems and was unaccompanied by essential documentation. From the time of its receipt as a finding aid in 1995, NARA has pursued various alternatives in attempting to preserve and utilize its contents. With the assistance of SAIC, NARA has finally converted the database (as far as possible) for NARA use.